

the Budget Committee, working with Chairman CONRAD, on a far better budget than the President's budget.

But, in my view, we can make improvements on it. We can do better than the budget we are now debating. To that regard, I will be introducing an amendment, and I want to thank the Presiding Officer for being one of the cosponsors of that amendment.

Let me very briefly talk about that. It seems to me, as we look at some of the trends that we should be addressing in this budget, at least three come to mind. No. 1 is the middle class is declining, No. 2 is our children are suffering, and No. 3 is that we have, among other things, a major infrastructural crisis in this country.

It is my view that we need a budget which will address some of those issues. I am very proud I will soon be introducing an amendment which is being cosponsored by Senators CLINTON, DURBIN, KENNEDY, HARKIN, SCHUMER, MIKULSKI, and BROWN.

This amendment is a pretty simple one. It puts the needs of our children, it puts the needs of our working families and people with disabilities and senior citizens ahead of the wealthy few.

At a time when our Presidential candidates in both parties are talking about change, change, and change, at a time when the American people overwhelming understand that it is imperative that we move this country in a different direction, this amendment can begin the process of change right here in the Senate, and, in fact, change our national priorities.

The choice the Senate will have in terms of this amendment is a pretty simple one: Do we continue to give tax breaks to the very wealthiest people in this country, people who have never had it so good, or do we invest in our children, our working families, and those people who are in need?

What this would do is restore the top income tax bracket to 39.6 percent for households earning more than \$1 million per year. Those are the only people who would be affected. And we would use that revenue to begin to address some of the most urgent, unmet needs of our children. We would address the issue of job creation; we would address the issue of deficit reduction.

Now, 99.7 percent of Americans would not be impacted by this tax change, only the top three-tenths of 1 percent would see their income tax rates go back to where they were during the Clinton administration when few would deny that the economy was far stronger than it currently is.

According to the Joint Tax Committee, restoring the top income tax brackets for people making more than \$1 million to what it was in 2000 would increase revenue by about \$32.5 billion over the next 3 years, including \$10.8 billion in 2009 alone.

So here is the choice. We can continue over a 3-year period to give \$32.5 billion in tax breaks to the top three-

tenths of 1 percent, people who economically are doing phenomenally well today, or we can invest it in the people in our country and use some of that for deficit reduction.

What could we do with \$32.5 billion? Well, let me tell you. We could, as our amendment does, expend \$10 billion for the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act; that is, special education.

Over 30 years ago, the Federal Government made a promise that it would fund 40 percent of the cost of special education. Unfortunately, today we only spend about 17 percent of the cost of special ed. I know in Vermont—I do not know about Ohio, but I can tell you that in Vermont, in school district after school district, property taxes are going up. And one of the reasons is the very high cost of special ed. You are seeing more and more kids coming into the system who have special ed needs.

Educating those kids is very expensive. The Federal Government has not kept its promise in adequately funding special ed. So it is the local property tax payers who have to pick up the cost. By putting \$10 billion more into special ed, not only can we help people stabilize their property taxes, but we can pay more attention to the kids with special ed needs. And both of those goals, to my mind, are goals that we should strive for.

This amendment would also increase Head Start funding by \$5 billion over the next 3 years. After adjusting for inflation, Head Start has been cut by over 11 percent compared to fiscal year 2002. Meanwhile, less than half of all eligible children are enrolled in Head Start, and only about 3 percent of eligible children are enrolled in Early Head Start. This amendment would begin to correct this situation.

What Head Start is about is what its title indicates. What we have known for a very long time is the most important intellectual and emotional years of a human being's life are their earliest years. If kids are not exposed to books and they are not exposed to ideas and they are not learning how to socialize and they do not have good emotional development, those kids are going to go off in a bad direction. And what Head Start was about, and what Head Start has been successful about, is giving kids the opportunity so that when they get into kindergarten and first grade, those kids will then be in a position in which they can learn effectively and can socialize well with their peers.

Head Start works. The problem right now is that it is inadequately funded, and millions of families simply cannot get into this very good program.

In addition to funding special education and Head Start, my amendment would also provide a \$4 billion increase for the childcare development block grant. One of the issues that we very rarely discuss in the Senate but that every working family with young children knows is a major crisis in America is the lack of availability of childcare, affordable, quality childcare.

How many millions of kids are now being minded by untrained people and being stuck in front of a television set for 8 hours a day? And what an unfortunate circumstance that is for our little kids, especially at a time when most women work and are entitled to good quality childcare. This amendment would provide funding to help do that.

This amendment would also provide a \$3.5 billion increase to the Food Stamp Program. Hunger in America—I know you know, Mr. President, because you and I are working on an issue to address this—is increasing. Food pantries are running out of food. That should not be taking place in this country. So what we do is add \$3.5 billion more to the Food Stamp Program.

In my State of Vermont, it gets pretty cold. That is true in many other States. Meanwhile, the price of home heating oil is soaring. You have many people who are having a difficult time paying their heating bills. This amendment would increase the very successful Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program, often called LIHEAP, by \$4 billion.

The bottom line is nobody in America should go cold in the winter.

Furthermore, this amendment would provide \$3 billion for school construction. There are kids who are going to schools that are outmoded. They are decrepit. They are not energy efficient. We can create a lot of good jobs. We can improve the quality of education by building modern schools and upgrading the schools that currently exist. We put \$3 billion into that.

Finally, at a time of record-breaking deficits, this amendment would reduce the deficit by \$3 billion.

I am happy to inform my colleagues that this amendment has been endorsed by over 50 groups, including the AFL-CIO, AFSCME, the National Education Association, Children's Defense Fund, the American Federation of Teachers, Easter Seals, the YWCA, the National Head Start Association, the SEIU, and the National Organization for Women.

Let me quote from a letter I received from all of these groups:

The economic downturn is creating crisis for parents who work hard but struggle to afford nutritious meals as food prices escalate; to pay for energy for their homes and fuel for their cars; to pay for child care so that they can work; and to assure that their young children receive the building blocks of a solid education to prepare them for the future. Programs that assist in meeting these needs have been cut significantly in recent years, while tax breaks for millionaires have soared. Your amendment addresses these needs. . . . We are urging the Senate to adopt your fiscally responsible amendment to address the pressing needs of working families while restoring greater progressivity to the tax system.

The choice is clear. We can provide \$32.5 billion in tax breaks to millionaires and billionaires who don't need it or we can begin to meet the unmet needs of our children. That is what this